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ABSTRACT

The Portland School District addresses the dropout problem through programs which fall into the following categories: (1) keeping students engaged in meaningful learning according to their needs, and counseling if necessary, (2) placing students appropriately; (3) monitoring their performance and (4) intervening to prevent and recover dropouts. Recommendations outline a system of education and youth training that considers the following: (1) the needs of families and children in order to ensure a good start in school; (2) basic academic skills and work maturity necessary for employment; (3) links among agencies and schools to meet developmental needs of children; (4) overcoming racism and lack of jobs; (5) individual learning needs of children; (6) dropout prevention; (7) personal support services, education, and employment and training programs for out-of-school youth; (8) expanded work experience opportunities for in-and-out-of-school youth; and (9) preparation for technological changes in the workplace. (LHW)

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FORUM ON DROPOUTS

SEPTEMBER 13, 1986

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MATTHEW W. PROPHET

SUPERINTENDENT

PORTLAND PUBLIC SCHOOLS

UD 025 252

IT IS A PLEASURE AND AN HONOR TO BE HERE TODAY. THE TOPIC OF THIS FORUM IS CRUCIAL FOR ALL OF US. WE MUST ADDRESS THIS ISSUE, AND BEING HERE TODAY IS AN OPPORTUNITY FOR WHICH I AM TRULY GRATEFUL.

EACH YEAR, NEARLY A THOUSAND PORTLAND YOUTH LEAVE THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS WITHOUT GRADUATING -- ONE OUT OF EVERY FIFTEEN HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS "DROPS OUT" DURING THE COURSE OF THE SCHOOL YEAR.

MANY OF THESE YOUTH EVENTUALLY ENROLL IN COMMUNITY COLLEGES, IN PRIVATE OR ALTERNATIVE SCHOOLS OR PROGRAMS, OR RETURN LATER TO THE PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM. BUT SOME BECOME "STREET KIDS," WHOSE EDUCATION AND CHANCES FOR FUTURE SUCCESS ARE SEVERELY JEOPARDIZED. MANY OF THESE YOUTHS ARE LACKING IN BASIC ACADEMIC AND EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS.

YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT IN PORTLAND IS HIGH. A 1980 CENSUS DATA SHOWED ABOUT 18 PERCENT OF ALL OUT-OF-SCHOOL 16-21 YEAR OLDS ARE UNEMPLOYED; 25 PERCENT OF ETHNIC MINORITY AND 29 PERCENT OF BLACK YOUTH. FIGURES FOR 1985 SHOWED THAT FOR 16-19 YEAR OLDS THERE ARE PROBABLY 22 PERCENT UNEMPLOYED; 40 PERCENT OF ETHNIC MINORITY AND 50 PERCENT OF BLACK YOUTH. THIS MEANS WE HAVE NEARLY 6,500 YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE PORTLAND AREA WHO ARE OUT OF WORK. WE HAVE MANY YOUNG PEOPLE WHO ARE NOT ACADEMICALLY PREPARED AND WHO MAY NOT HAVE AN UNDERSTANDING OF THE WORKING WORLD.

HERE ARE SOME CHARACTERISTICS OF TYPICAL DROPOUTS REPORTED IN THE NATIONAL RESEARCH:

- FEELINGS OF ALIENATION AND LACK OF BELONGING
- LOW SELF-ESTEEM
- RECORD OF TRUANCY AND ABSENTEEISM
- LOW ACHIEVEMENT IN ACADEMIC SUBJECTS (ESPECIALLY READING)
- FAILING GRADES
- HELD BACK A YEAR SOMETIME DURING SCHOOLING
- NONINVOLVEMENT IN EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES
- PARENTS WHO WERE SCHOOL DROPOUTS
- MINORITY (ESPECIALLY IN LARGE URBAN DISTRICTS)
- DELINQUENT BEHAVIOR
- TEENAGE PREGNANCY
- TEENAGE MARRIAGE

STUDIES IN WHICH DROPOUTS ARE ASKED DIRECTLY: "WHY DID YOU DROP OUT?" MAY BETTER INDICATE CAUSES. IN THE OREGON EARLY SCHOOL LEAVERS STUDY (1980), THE MOST COMMONLY NAMED REASONS FOR LEAVING WERE:

1. DISSATISFACTION WITH TEACHERS (19.3%)
2. DISLIKE OF SCHOOL IN GENERAL (15.3%)
3. LACK OF CREDITS (13.6%)
4. DISLIKE OF SPECIFICALLY NAMED SCHOOL (13.5%)
5. BOREDOM/LACK OF INTEREST (11.7%)
6. PREGNANCY (11.4% OF FEMALES)
7. DESIRE FOR ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION PROGRAM/INSTITUTION (11.2%)

OTHER STUDIES POINT TO SOME OF THOSE SAME FACTORS AS WELL AS TO A DESIRE TO WORK, TO PROBLEMS WITH DISCIPLINE, AND TO ACADEMIC DIFFICULTIES.

THE PORTLAND SCHOOL DISTRICT HAS AN EXTENSIVE ARRAY OF PROGRAMS ADDRESSING THE DROPOUT PROBLEM. THESE PROGRAMS ARE BEST UNDERSTOOD WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF THE FOLLOWING CATEGORIES: ORGANIZATION, PLACEMENT, MONITORING AND INTERVENTION.

ORGANIZATION

THE IMPORTANT TASK OF KEEPING STUDENTS ENGAGED, SUCCESSFUL, AND IN SCHOOL IS A TEAM EFFORT IN OUR SYSTEM AND ONE THAT BEGINS THE DAY A STUDENT COMES TO THE DISTRICT.

BY THE TIME STUDENTS ENTER HIGH SCHOOL, A COMBINATION OF INDIVIDUALIZED COUNSELING AND TUTORING, AS WELL AS ALTERNATIVE AND REMEDIAL PROGRAMS, ARE EMPLOYED TO KEEP STUDENTS INVOLVED AND SUCCESSFUL IN SCHOOL.

FOR THE PAST FIFTEEN YEARS, THIS DISTRICT HAS BEEN REORGANIZING IN THE DIRECTION OF PROVIDING K-5 OR PK-5 GRADE ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS WITH AN IDEALLY APPROPRIATE ENROLLMENT OF APPROXIMATELY 300 STUDENTS. THESE ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS "FEED INTO" LOCAL 6-8 GRADE MIDDLE SCHOOLS WITH AN IDEALLY APPROPRIATE ENROLLMENT OF APPROXIMATELY 600 STUDENTS. THESE MIDDLE SCHOOLS ARE IN TURN CLUSTERED AND FEED INTO 9-12 GRADE HIGH SCHOOLS WITH AN IDEALLY APPROPRIATE ENROLLMENT OF APPROXIMATELY 1600 STUDENTS. WE HAVE FOUND THAT WE ARE ABLE TO BEST PROVIDE COMPREHENSIVE PROGRAMS WHICH ADDRESS ALL STUDENTS' NEEDS BY STARTING FROM THIS ORGANIZATIONAL BASIS.

THE PORTLAND SCHOOL SYSTEM EXISTS TO HELP EVERY CHILD ENTRUSTED TO ITS CARE DEVELOP AND REALIZE HIS OR HER FULLEST ACADEMIC, VOCATIONAL, SOCIAL, AND PERSONAL LEARNING POTENTIAL AND ASPIRATIONS. THE DISTRICT SEEKS TO PROVIDE LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES IN WAYS RESPONSIVE TO THE UNIQUENESS OF EACH INDIVIDUAL STUDENT, WITH THE HOPE THAT EACH WILL LEAD A PRODUCTIVE LIFE, CONTRIBUTE TO SOCIETY, AND HAVE A POSITIVE ATTITUDE TOWARD LEARNING AS A LIFELONG ENDEAVOR. MOREOVER, WE TAKE SPECIAL CARE THAT LEARNING PROCEEDS WITH EQUAL OPPORTUNITY FOR STUDENTS OF ALL CULTURAL, LINGUISTIC, AND ETHNIC BACKGROUNDS.

WITHIN THE PORTLAND SCHOOLS, THE COMPREHENSIVE HIGH SCHOOL IS THE PRIMARY SYSTEM FOR ACHIEVING THE MISSION OF SECONDARY EDUCATION. IT IS THE ROLE OF THE COMPREHENSIVE HIGH SCHOOL TO CARRY OUT THE FOLLOWING FUNCTIONS:

1. PROVIDE A BROAD RANGE OF COURSE OFFERINGS.
2. PROVIDE A VARIETY OF APPROACHES BY WHICH STUDENTS CAN ACHIEVE CREDIT TOWARD GRADUATION.
3. PROVIDE POSITIVE ENRICHMENT IN COURSE CONTENT.
4. PROVIDE A POSITIVE EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT FOR STUDENTS.
5. PROVIDE GUIDANCE AND COUNSELING SERVICES FOR STUDENTS.
6. PROVIDE ADDITIONAL SUPPORT SERVICES FOR STUDENTS AS NEEDED.
7. PROVIDE FOR INTERSCHOOL AND INTRAMURAL ACTIVITIES.
8. PROVIDE OPPORTUNITIES FOR STUDENTS TO INTERACT WITH REPRESENTATIVES OF VARIOUS COMMUNITY RESOURCES, GROUPS AND AGENCIES.

9. PROVIDE A MEANS OF COMMUNICATING WITH PARENTS, PATRONS AND THE COMMUNITY; OF ADAPTING TO CHANGES IN HE COMMUNITY AND IN SOCIETY; AND OF REMAINING A FUNCTIONAL SOCIAL AGENCY.

10. PROVIDE A MEANS OF DETERMINING AND IMPROVING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF HIGH SCHOOL PROGRAMS.

PLACEMENT

AT EACH STAGE OF A STUDENT'S ACADEMIC CAREER, THE STUDENT, THE STUDENT'S PARENTS, AND APPROPRIATE SCHOOL PERSONNEL REVIEW THE STUDENT'S PROGRESS IN SCHOOL AND DISTRICT OFFERINGS TO DETERMINE THE MOST-APPROPRIATE PLACEMENT OF THE STUDENT. IN CONJUNCTION WITH THE LOCAL ELEMENTARY, MIDDLE AND HIGH SCHOOL PROGRAMS, THE DISTRICT OFFERS A VARIETY OF OPTIONS TO MEET INDIVIDUAL STUDENT NEEDS. THESE OPTIONS INCLUDE IN-SCHOOL OPPORTUNITIES, SUCH AS SPECIAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS, ALTERNATIVE PROGRAMS, AND SPECIALIZED ELECTIVE COURSES; IN-DISTRICT OPPORTUNITIES, SUCH AS MAGNET PROGRAMS, TRANSFER PROGRAMS, NIGHT PROGRAMS, AND ALTERNATIVE SCHOOLS; AND EXTERNAL OPPORTUNITIES OFFERED THROUGH A VARIETY OF COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS.

MONITORING

THE DISTRICT MONITORS STUDENT PERFORMANCE AT THE DISTRICT, SCHOOL AND CLASSROOM LEVELS:

. DISTRICT MONITORING

- THE OFFICE OF MANAGEMENT INFORMATION SERVICES MONITORS COMPUTERIZED RECORDS OF HIGH SCHOOL CLASS ATTENDANCE, GRADES, AND CREDITS EARNED TO IDENTIFY POTENTIALLY "AT RISK" STUDENTS.

- PORTLAND'S PROJECT RETURN IDENTIFIES STUDENTS PICKED UP OFF THE STREET AND RETURNED TO SCHOOL.

- CIVIC AND COMMUNITY AGENCIES SERVE PORTLAND YOUTH AND WORK WITH DISTRICT OFFICES TO IDENTIFY STUDENTS FOR BOTH LEAVER PREVENTION AND RECOVERY ACTIVITIES.

. SCHOOL MONITORING

- SCHOOLS MONITOR ATTENDANCE, GRADES AND CREDITS EARNED TO IDENTIFY STUDENTS WHO MAY REQUIRE ADDITIONAL ATTENTION.

. CLASSROOM MONITORING

- TEACHERS MONITOR STUDENT PERFORMANCE TO DETERMINE WHERE ATTENTION NEEDS TO BE FOCUSED.

INTERVENTION

A NUMBER OF INTERVENTION ACTIVITIES ARE UNDERTAKEN AT PORTLAND PUBLIC SCHOOLS TO PREVENT AND RECOVER SCHOOL DROPOUTS. LET ME MENTION JUST A FEW SUCH ACTIVITIES WHICH ARE RECEIVING PRIORITY ATTENTION THIS YEAR:

- PROJECT RETURN

THE SERVICES OF PROJECT RETURN WILL BE EXPANDED THROUGH THE ADDITION OF AN ATTENDANCE COUNSELOR. ALSO, ONE TRANSITIONAL CLASSROOM WILL BE ESTABLISHED IN NORTHEAST PORTLAND TO SERVE STUDENTS AGES 12 TO 15 FOR UP TO SIXTY DAYS PRIOR TO BEING REASSIGNED TO A REGULAR SCHOOL PROGRAM OR ALTERNATIVE PROGRAM. APPROXIMATELY FIVE HUNDRED STUDENTS WERE SERVED IN THE 1985-86 SCHOOL YEAR, AND MORE ARE ANTICIPATED IN 1986-87.

- NATIVE AMERICAN PROGRAM

THERE ARE TWO SPECIFIC NEW GOALS FOR 1986-87 -- REDUCE THE DROP-OUT RATE AND REDUCE THE NUMBER OF STUDENTS ASSIGNED TO SPECIAL EDUCATION. A STUDENT COUNSELOR AND A SOCIAL WORKER HAVE BEEN ADDED TO THE PROGRAM TO ADDRESS STUDENT CONCERNS. ATTENDANCE MONITORING WILL LEAD TO ASSISTING NATIVE AMERICAN STUDENTS WHO ATTEND SCHOOL IRREGULARLY.

- HISPANIC PROGRAM

THE DISTRICT WILL EXPAND ITS HIGH SCHOOL INTERVENTION STRATEGIES FOR HISPANIC STUDENTS WHICH WERE ENORMOUSLY EFFECTIVE THIS YEAR IN IMPROVING SUCCESSFUL COURSE COMPLETION AND PROGRESS IN SCHOOL. DISTRICT STAFF WILL MORE ACTIVELY FOSTER LINKAGES WITH HISPANIC PARENTS AND COMMUNITY GROUPS TO ENSURE THAT ESSENTIAL ATTENTION IS PAID TO HISPANIC CONCERNS.

- BILINGUAL SPECIALIST PROGRAM

WE WILL BEGIN A PILOT PROGRAM WHERE BILINGUAL SPECIALISTS WILL ASSIST SCHOOL COUNSELORS, TEACHERS AND OTHER DISTRICT STAFF IN PREVENTION AND INTERVENTION OF SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL PROBLEMS WITH LIMITED ENGLISH PROFICIENT STUDENTS.

- IN-SCHOOL SCOUTING

IN-SCHOOL SCOUTING, A COOPERATIVE PROGRAM OF BOY SCOUTS OF AMERICA, GIRL SCOUTS OF USA AND CAMP FIRE, IN CONJUNCTION WITH PORTLAND PUBLIC SCHOOLS, WAS INITIATED IN 1981 AS A PILOT PROGRAM DESIGNED TO ADDRESS SPECIFIC COMMUNITY NEEDS. THE ORIGINAL MOTIVATION TO OFFER AN IN-CLASS TYPE OF PROGRAM CENTERED ON PROVIDING A HIGH-QUALITY, INFORMAL EDUCATION EXPERIENCE FOR THOSE PORTLAND-AREA YOUTH WHOM, TRADITIONALLY, THE AGENCIES HAD BEEN UNABLE OR MINIMALLY SUCCESSFUL IN SERVING. SINCE ITS INCEPTION, IN-SCHOOL SCOUTING IN PORTLAND HAS BECOME A NATIONALLY RECOGNIZED PROGRAM AND HAS OVER 2,300 BOYS AND GIRLS CURRENTLY ENROLLED IN 14 PARTICIPATING PORTLAND PUBLIC SCHOOLS.

- CONTINUING EDUCATION FOR GIRLS

THE CONTINUING EDUCATION FOR GIRLS PROGRAM IS REVIEWING CURRICULUM STRATEGIES FOR ITS ALTERNATIVE PROGRAM. HIGH ON ITS PRIORITY LISTS ARE TEEN-PARENTING, CAREER EDUCATION AND VOCATIONAL TRAINING. COORDINATION WITH THE DISTRICT'S VOCATIONAL EDUCATION PROGRAM IS PROVIDING A MENTORSHIP PROJECT IN VOCATIONAL TRAINING.

DRUG AND ALCOHOL PROGRAM

THE ALCOHOL AND DRUG PROGRAM WILL BEGIN ITS THIRD YEAR WITH THIRTY SCHOOLS IMPLEMENTING COMPREHENSIVE PROGRAMS. WE WILL DISSEMINATE MATERIALS DEVELOPED TO ASSIST STAFF WHO WORK WITH CHILDREN IN DRUG-AFFECTED FAMILIES AND INITIATE A STUDY OF ADOLESCENT TOBACCO USE AS A HEALTH RISK AND AS A "GATEWAY" TO OTHER DRUG USE. WE WILL ALSO BEGIN A CRITICAL REVIEW OF THE ARRAY OF DRUG-RELATED SERVICES THE DISTRICT CURRENTLY PROVIDES. THERE IS NEW INFORMATION (THE RECENT STATE SURVEY, OUR OWN PROGRAM EVALUATION), INCREASING INVOLVEMENT OF OTHER AGENCIES IN ADDRESSING THE DRUG PROBLEM, AND INCREASING COMMUNITY CONCERN SINCE THE 1983 CITIZEN TASK FORCE DESIGNED THE EXISTING DRUG PROGRAM MODEL. WE WILL TAKE THIS OPPORTUNITY TO CONSIDER WHAT IS WORKING AND WHAT MIGHT BE IMPROVED.

THE FUTURE

IT IS CLEAR FROM THE DATA THAT THERE ARE SEVERAL THOUSAND CHILDREN IN PORTLAND WHO ARE OUT OF SCHOOL, OUT OF WORK, AND IN SOME CASES, OUT OF HOME. THERE ARE HUNDREDS OF AGENCIES WHICH SERVE SOME OF THESE CHILDREN IN SOME WAYS. HOWEVER, THERE HAS NOT BEEN ONE COMPREHENSIVE SYSTEM TO ENSURE THAT THE NEEDS OF ALL THE CHILDREN ARE BEING MET, OR THAT THE RESOURCES WHICH ARE BEING USED ARE BEING USED MOST EFFECTIVELY OR EFFICIENTLY.

SINCE AUGUST, 1985, THE PORTLAND LEADERS ROUNDTABLE HAS BEEN COORDINATING A COMPREHENSIVE RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT EFFORT INVOLVING SEVERAL HUNDRED PORTLAND CITIZENS, BUSINESSES, PROFESSIONS AND SERVICE AGENCIES, AIMED AT

CREATING A COMPREHENSIVE PLAN FOR YOUTH EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT IN PORTLAND. THE RESULTS OF THIS PLANNING EFFORT, THE ROUNDTABLE'S REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS OUTLINE A SYSTEM OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING FOR YOUTH THAT DOES THE FOLLOWING:

- ATTENDS TO THE NEEDS OF FAMILIES AND CHILDREN SO CHILDREN HAVE THE BEST POSSIBLE START IN SCHOOL.

- DELIVERS THE BASIC ACADEMIC SKILLS AND WORK MATURITY THAT YOUTH NEED TO BE EMPLOYABLE.

- ESTABLISHES LINKAGES AMONG AGENCIES AND SCHOOLS TO MEET THE DEVELOPMENTAL NEEDS OF CHILDREN AND YOUTH.

- CONSCIOUSLY WORKS TO OVERCOME TWO MAJOR BARRIERS -- LACK OF JOBS AND RACIAL BIAS.

- PROVIDES CHANGES WITHIN THE SCHOOL SYSTEM TO MEET THE INDIVIDUAL LEARNING NEEDS OF CHILDREN AND YOUTH AND TO PREVENT SCHOOL DROPOUTS.

- DEVELOPS A COMPREHENSIVE SYSTEM OF SERVICES FOR OUT-OF-SCHOOL YOUTH THAT MERGES THREE ESSENTIAL COMPONENTS -- PERSONAL SUPPORT SERVICES, EDUCATION, AND EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING PROGRAMS.

- IMPROVES THE JOB CLIMATE FOR YOUTH.

- PROVIDES AND EXPANDS WORK EXPERIENCE OPPORTUNITIES FOR IN-SCHOOL AND OUT-OF-SCHOOL YOUTH.

- PROVIDES EDUCATION AND TRAINING PROGRAMS THAT PREPARE YOUTH TO ADAPT TO TECHNOLOGICAL CHANGES IN THE WORKPLACE.

THIS IS THE DIRECTION WE SEE FOR PORTLAND AND THE PORTLAND PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM. WE WILL NEED THE SUPPORT OF OUR COMMUNITIES, HERE IN PORTLAND, THROUGHOUT THE STATE AND ACROSS THE NATION. WITH THAT SUPPORT, OUR SCHOOLS WILL CONTINUE TO BECOME PLACES OF EXCELLENCE AND SUCCESS FOR ALL OUR CHILDREN.